

National Road: Wilson Bridge
Spanning Conococheague Creek
on Old Route 40
Hagerstown vicinity
Washington County
Maryland

HAER No. MD-41

HAER

MD

22-HAGTO.V,

2 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Road: Wilson Bridge

HAER No. MD-41

HAER
MD,
22-HAGTO.V,
2-

Location: Spanning Conococheague Creek on Old Route 40, 7 miles west of Hagerstown, Washington County, Maryland.

Date of Construction: 1817-1819

Engineers/Builders: Built by Silas Harry

Present Owner: Board of County Commissioners
Washington County
Court House Annex
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Present Use: Following partial washing out of two arches on the north (upstream) side of the bridge in March 1982, the bridge was rehabilitated in 1984 for pedestrian use as part of a county park.

Significance: Wilson Bridge was built in 1819 by Silas Harry as part of an improvement of feeder roads leading to the National Road which began in Cumberland, Maryland and ended in Vandalia, Illinois. Its five stone arches span 215 feet. The bridge was one of few multiple-arch structures on the National Road and was considered one of the finest. The contract price for construction was \$9,100 and it took approximately 18 months to complete. Bypassed in 1937 by a new alignment of the road and construction of a three span concrete arch, the bridge continued in local service till 1972. In March 1982, half of the center and an adjacent arch to the west collapsed on the upstream side. The bridge was scheduled for demolition for safety reasons and for the prohibitive costs of rehabilitation estimated to be between \$300,000 and \$400,000. Following an expression of public concern, the decision was made by the county to rehabilitate the bridge for pedestrian and park purposes.

Historian: H. H. Douglas, Founder, Pioneer America Society, Inc., Department of Geography, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325, following field work conducted on June 26, 1982, by the Montgomery C. Meigs Original Chapter, Society for Industrial Archeology (MCMOC/SIA).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
General.....	3-5
Condensed Construction Agreement.....	6
Summary by Maryland Historical Trust.....	7-8
Description by Maryland Historical Trust.....	9-10
Significance by Maryland Historical Trust.....	11-15
Bibliography.....	16-17

The five arch stone bridge over Conococheague Creek, seven miles west of Hagerstown, is crumbling. This bridge carried all Route 40 traffic, both east and west, for 115 years. Minor changes and maintenance were done as necessary. At some point the boarding covering the top of the parapet walls was removed and replaced by the concrete coping there today.

Though by-passed by a modern concrete span in 1937, Wilson Bridge continued in use because the alignment of the new bridge did not allow access to a northbound route to Rockdale and other communities along the Conococheague. The bridge was in regular use, with no weight limit, until flooding caused by Hurricane Agnes damaged the structure in June 1972. After Agnes, the bridge was closed to vehicular traffic and a new road was built linking the road to Rockdale with the west end of the current Route 40 bridge. Before long, the bridge was closed to foot traffic by a barrier at each end.

Minor breaks on the upstream side were noted in the fall of 1981. In March 1982, two upstream arches and the upstream ends of the adjacent piers collapsed. A sizeable break also occurred near the east end. For the time being, the rest of the structure seemed reasonably stable, but without immediate stabilization of the collapsed arches, the rest of the bridge would eventually fall into the river. At this time (December 1982) there are no signs of any effort to repair, stabilize, or restore the bridge. (As of December 1984, Wilson Bridge was rehabilitated for pedestrian and park purposes following public concern over demolition of the structure; ed. note).

Wilson Bridge was built during the heyday of wagons and stagecoach or, when thousands of home seekers made their way west to new lands in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and farther. It was one of several such stone bridges: the three arched Jug Bridge over the Monocacy just east of Frederick; the Funkstown Turnpike Bridge over the Antietam at Funkstown; the Casselman over Casselman River near Grantsville; Wills Creek Bridge just west of Cumberland; and Big Crossings over the Youghiogheny in Pennsylvania. These bridges served their purpose well for 160-170 years but time takes its toll. The Jug Bridge partially collapsed in 1942, Casselman Bridge has been by-passed but is being maintained, while backwater from a new dam has completely submerged Big Crossings. The construction of these old stone bridges leaves knowledgeable people somewhat aghast. The exterior, finished stonework was superior, while the interior spaces were filled with rubble.

Wagons and people crossed the streams before there were bridges of any kind. A half mile below Wilson Bridge, the old Kershner Ford, which was part of the old Alleghany Road (pre-dating the National Road) can still be seen. This old ford was not only a part of the way west, but it made it possible for local people east of the stream to attend services at St. Paul's Reformed and Lutheran Church and have access to St. Paul's Cemetery.

Early roads followed the line of least resistance. They never climbed a hill if they could go around it. Before the new alignment was completed in 1937, going west the road crossed the stone bridge, swung left and crossed the

present road, went on through the woods a few hundred feet, and turned up the hill to the right. Here it was in Wilson, a tiny village with two big brick and stone houses, a farm complex, a store and warehouse, the Wilson Congregational Chapel (1908), a brick one room schoolhouse, and a stone house which is now a residence.

Mrs. Loretta (Wilson) Hayman (c.90) still lives in the brick and stone house next to the store. Her father was a Wilson, her grandfather was a Huyett.

A few hundred feet beyond the village the old road returns to the pike.

CONDENSED VERSION OF CONSTRUCTION AGREEMENT

Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Company with Silas Harry, Agreemnet BK CC, pp. 394-5 (1818), Washington County, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Meeting of minds December 21, 1817.

Article of Agreement recorded January 14, 1818 with Silas Harry, David Fullerton and Jos. Culbertson, all of Franklin County, Pa., to build a stone bridge over the Conococheague Creek on the Hagerstown Turnpike near Witmer's Mill. 24 ft. from out to out -- 5 arches. Curtain walls to be 2 feet thick above the bed of the road. Distance between abutments 210 feet.

The bridge [curtain] walls to be covered with good pine boards or shingles, and to be painted in a complete manner with two coats of Spanish brown.

To fill between the arches ready for tpkg and to tpk the road across the bridge. To complete by 12/1/1818. [Not completed until June 20, 1819].

Wilson Bridge - Silas Harry

Compensation \$9,100.

President and managers to procure the privilege for the said Harry of getting the stone for the building of the bridge, and make the typk across the aforesaid, clear of expenses to said Harry.

The company had access to \$20,000 for the total completion of the project.

SUMMARY BY MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST (June 1973)

Wilson's Bridge, which is no longer open to traffic, originally carried the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike (the National Pike) across the Conococheague Creek seven miles west of Hagerstown. The five-arched structure, the longest of the county's stone bridges, is 210 feet in length and is constructed of local limestone. The bridge appears symmetrical with the largest of its five segmental arches being at the center of the span. The arches are lined with carefully cut voussoirs [the wedge shaped stones that form the arches] and are supported by piers terminating with rounded projections.

A tablet set in the north wall of the bridge indicates that the bridge was erected in 1819 by Silas Harry [of Chambersburg, Pa.], who had built similar bridges in Pennsylvania. Wilson's Bridge remained open to traffic until June of 1972 when it was damaged by floods which occurred during tropical storm Agnes.

Architecturally, this bridge is highly significant as an example of the type of bridges extensively used in Washington County. It is the oldest known stone bridge in the county and as the first, appears to have set a trend in stone bridge building which continued during the next thirty years. Until it was closed in 1972, the bridge accommodated traffic of a much greater volume than it was designed to carry. It is also important as an example of the

engineering capabilities of early 19th century builders. Wilson's bridge is one of six historic stone bridges -- part of Maryland's state road system in Washington County, and one of 10 historic stone bridges throughout the entire state road network -- identified by the Maryland Historical Trust for the Maryland Department of Transportation in a jointly conducted survey which took place during 1980-81.

DESCRIPTION Prepared by the Maryland Historical Trust (1971 or early 1972)

This bridge, now owned by the Washington County Commissioners, is in sound condition, still used by unrestricted local traffic and is virtually unchanged from its original appearance. The only changes being the substitution of concrete for the original painted wood work which topped the stone parapet walls on either side of the roadway. The other change being the covering of the original roadway with a black asphalt paving. In addition to these changes only tuck-pointing of the stone work has been required.

The native limestone bridge was constructed between December 31, 1817 and June 20, 1819. The marble builder's stone placed in the north parapet at the center of the bridge fronting the roadway identifies the builder as Silas Harry and the construction date as 1819.

On December 31, 1817, the managers of the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Road Company, the company which financed the bridge, entered into an Agreement Contract with Silas Harry, the bridge builder. The contract stated in part as follows: "that the said Silas Harry for the consideration hereafter mentioned, hath agreed to build and complete in a workman like manner, a stone bridge over the Conococheague Creek, on the Hagerstown turnpike road near Witmers Mill, of the width of twenty-four feet from out to out, to consist of five arches of a size sufficient to answer the Creek (none of the arches exceeded forty (40) feet); and with sufficient wing and curtain walls - the curtain walls to be two feet thick above the bed of the road the

distance between the abutments to be two hundred and ten feet - the bridge [curtain] walls to be covered over with good pine boards or shingles, and to be painted in a complete manner with two coats of Spanish brown - The said Harry agrees to fill between the arches ready for turnpiking, and to turnpike the road across the bridge in a workman like manner..." Between June 18 and June 20, 1819, three commissioners appointed by the State Governor inspected the work and reported it "completed and executed in a masterly and workman like manner." The governor on the 28th day of July 1819, licensed the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Road Company to erect "gates" and "to collect the tolls and duties granted by law."

The 3.1 acres of land included within this nominated site are privately owned except for the Bridge and the 50 foot right-of-way which is held by the County Commissioners of Washington County. Private land owners are: Conococheague Amusement Park, Inc., approximately 1.25 acres on the north side, legal description 364/182, location: Clerk of the Court, Washington County Court House, Hagerstown, Maryland, and William H. Chaney, approximately 1.25 acres on the South side, legal description 229/309, location: Clerk of the Court, Washington County Court House, Hagerstown, Maryland.

SIGNIFICANCE

The national significance of this bridge is that it provided the connecting link between the "Bank Road" portion of the National Road (US Route 40 from Wilson Bridge to Cumberland) and the roads which led to the eastern seaport cities of Baltimore, Maryland, Washington, DC, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The bridge is a fine almost unaltered example of the art of bridge building at the time when the westward expansion of the United States was reaching unprecedented heights. The construction of this bridge over the sometime turbulent Conococheague Creek facilitated the flow of emigration and commerce between the mid-Atlantic coast cities and the west from 1819 until approximately 1937 when U.S. Route 40 was relocated approximately two hundred (200) feet down stream from the subject bridge. The bridge is still in sound condition and is used daily by unrestricted local traffic. The Wilson bridge was the first stone bridge to be built in Washington County, Maryland, and served as an example for the thirty (30) or more stone bridges of various sizes which subsequently appeared throughout the county. It is the longest stone bridge and also the western most such bridge in Washington County. Of the two (2) stone bridges which carried the National Road (U.S. Route 40) across the creeks of Washington County, the Wilson Bridge survives as least altered. The other bridge which spans the Antietam at Funkstown has been greatly altered by the addition of contiguous concrete arches.

Soon after the organization of the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Road Company, advertising appeared in the area papers requesting bids for

construction of the turnpike road and for erecting the bridge across the nearly two hundred (200) feet wide Conococheague Creek seven (7) miles west of the "market space" in Hagerstown. The MARYLAND HERALD AND HAGERSTOWN WEEKLY ADVERTISER carried the advertisement beginning in November 1817 and concluding in December of the same year. The advertisement, authorized by the company managers, simply stated, "will receive proposals for building a stone bridge over the Conococheague Creek, to be erected by the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Company, near Witmers Mill, width of Creek about 200 feet. I will also receive proposals for building the stone piers and abutments for a wooden bridge over the same place. The proposals to include the whole expense of quarrying and hauling the stone, finding lime, scaffold poles and every other material for finishing the mason work...proposals for the above must be left with the President of the Company on or before the 25th day of December next [1817]. I will also receive proposals for making the turnpike road from the "market space" in Hagerstown to the Conococheague Creek, a distance of seven miles -- either for the whole, or in sections of one quarter, one half, or one mile." The January 7, 1818, issue of the same newspaper contained two articles of interest concerning the subject bridge. The company's treasurer had authorized the following: "The President and Managers of the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Company having entered into contracts for turnpiking the whole road and for building a stone bridge over Conococheague Creek: The stockholders who have not yet paid up the first installment, are requested to make payment, as money must be had immediately. Those who neglect this notice must not be surprised if they find legal measures resorted to in a short time." The second item is signed

"A Stockholder," and states, "The bridge is to be built of stone, by Mr. Silas Harry of Chambersburg, who has built many bridges of the kind in Pennsylvania, and has given general satisfaction. There is no doubt that the bridge will be built in a style of workmanship not inferior to any on this continent. Thus, we shall have a turnpike road of seven miles, and a stone bridge completed, in two years, and the people from the westward will be enabled to travel to Baltimore on a good turnpike road by way of Harman's Gap, in a shorter distance than any route near the Potomac."

The managers of the turnpike company had entered into an agreement with Silas Harry on December 31, 1817, to build the bridge for \$9,100. The bridge was to be twenty-four feet in width, the curtain walls to be two feet thick above the road bed, the abutments to be two hundred and ten feet apart and the bridge to have five arches of sufficient size to "answer the Creek." The contract continued that the parapets were to be covered with good pine boards or shingles, and to be painted with two coats of Spanish Brown and that Harry would fill between the arches and turnpike the road across the bridge. Silas Harry also had "to warrant and defend the same from accidents by freshets or otherwise for the term of five years," from the time it was "accepted and received from his hands by the Board of Managers."

On June 18, 1819, Governor Charles Goldsborough, of Maryland, commissioned Henry Shafer, William Gabby and Thomas Heller to "examine and report in writing to the Governor of Maryland whether the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Road is completed and executed in a masterly and workman like manner

agreeable to the provisions of the several Acts of Assembly thereto relating." The written report was returned on June 20, 1819, stating that the commissioners "had viewed and examined the said roads and that the same is completed and executed in a masterly and workman like manner agreeably to the provisions of said laws." Based on this report the governor then issued a license to the President and managers of the company to "erect and fix such and so many gates" to "collect the tolls and duties granted by law to the said company from all persons traveling on the same with horses, cattle, wagons, carts and carriages." The license was granted on July 18, 1819.

For the next ninety-two (92) years the turnpike company operated their system. In 1910/1911 the Maryland State Roads Commission (now Maryland State Highway Administration) acquired the company's holding for \$23,090.04 plus \$766.90 for Administrative, Legal and Engineering fees. Although a considerable sum of money was spent by the State Roads Commission to resurface the newly acquired system no money was then spent for maintenance of the said bridge. By 1937, Wilson bridge had been bypassed by a three hundred and seventy (370) foot, triple span, open spandrel, reinforced concrete arch bridge two hundred (200) feet down stream at the cost of approximately \$100,000. The State Roads Commission's report published in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 4, 1937, stated that the new bridge "relegates to the past the old bridge which had a very dangerous approach from the west, and the doing away with such an approach is certainly building safety into the highway."

The old stone bridge was shortly thereafter made the responsibility of the Washington County Commissioners and integrated into the county roads system.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bridges - Our Legacy in Stone, Exhibition by the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, Maryland, August - September 1965.
2. Highway Magazine, Vol. 48, September 1957, "Maryland's Stone Arch Bridges" by James L. Creasy.
3. Report of the Highways of Maryland by Maryland Geological Survey 1899.
4. Report of the State Roads Commission to the Maryland General Assembly for 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, Baltimore, Maryland, January 1916.
5. Report of the State Roads Commission "Operating Reports 1925 - 36" and "Financial Report for Fiscal Year 1936," Baltimore, Maryland, March 4, 1937.
6. Report of the State Roads Commission for 1937 - 1938, Baltimore, Maryland.
7. History of Road Building in Maryland.
8. Minutes and Proceedings of the November Term 1817, Washington County, Page 24, Washington County Court House.
9. The Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, Hagerstown, Md., December 3, 1817; December 28, 1817; January 7, 1818; January 14, 1818.
10. The Odd Fellow, Boonsboro, Maryland, May 22, 1849.
11. The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, Maryland, April 13, 1928.
12. The Morning Herald, Hagerstown, Maryland, August 25, 1955.
13. Washington County Land Records, Washington County Court House, Hagerstown, Maryland:
 - Liber CC, Folio 367, Date 1817
 - Liber CC, Folio 394, Date 1818
 - Liber CC, Folio 446, Date 1818
 - Liber EE, Folio 343, Date 1820
14. Maryland State Roads Commission Plats, Clerk of the Court's Office, Washington County Court House, Hagerstown, Maryland:
 - Plat No. 2261, Date February 18, 1936
 - Plat No. 2623, Date April 30, 1936

15. Wiles, David E. "Wilson Bridge is Falling Down." Windmills of Time, Clear Spring Alumni Association, Clear Spring, Md. 1981, pp. 128-134. Nine pictures.